

## Endless 251

### Chapter 251: Trap

"Team Leader, are you sure this guy is trustworthy?"

Kemp witnessed Bologue facing the flames, stepping into the sea of fire. To him, it seemed like a suicidal act. This sole reinforcement had traveled over mountains and rivers to get here, just to die? This was too absurd, wasn't it?

"I'm not sure either. With debtors, you can never tell, right?" Yas replied.

As soon as Yas finished speaking, Kemp saw the burnt figure burst out of the sea of fire, killing several thugs in succession. Under the brutal hammer strikes, flesh and blood shattered into large patches of filthy blood.

Kemp wanted to complain about something, but the words got stuck in his throat, and he found himself at a loss for what to say.

And this was just the beginning. Then Bologue showed Kemp another use of the Arm of Adaptation, using the hooked chain to drag a thug, instantly smashing them into a broken corpse.

Watching Bologue's hammer strikes, Kemp felt like he was in the front row of a cinema, watching a horror movie.

Shelley peeked out. She just happened to see Bologue twisting a thug's throat, then smashing in another person's head.

"Oh..."

She let out a series of moans, frowned, and squinted her eyes, reacting as if a horror movie had just hit a terrifying scene.

Looking at Bologue rampaging across the battlefield, Kemp glanced at the gun in his hand. He suddenly realized this guy didn't seem to need cover, and compared to these thugs, it was obvious Bologue was the more villainous one.

"Where did the Special Operations Group find this guy... a convict from the Black Prison?"

Vague bursts of laughter came from ahead, and Bologue seemed as happy as a chainsaw-wielding maniac. Seeing this, Shelley momentarily forgot about the pain, mumbling to herself.

"He indeed is a convict from the Black Prison." Yas unexpectedly confirmed this guess.

Yas wasn't present, but knowing Bologue well, he understood why they were saying this and what was happening on the scene.

"Don't worry," Yas said, "I know a few good psychologists at the medical department."

"Is it for him?"

Shelley asked while still watching the battlefield. Now Bologue had snatched a Fire-Calling Staff and was wantonly releasing flames, almost burning through all the mist in the area.

"How could it be, such a guy would only drive the psychologists insane."

Yas thought he understood Bologue. Beneath his cold exterior was a mind ready to go mad at any moment. God knows what he might do.

"It's for you guys. I'm afraid you'll be vegetarians for a while now."

Shelley quickly understood what Yas meant, as the dense scent of decay wafted over with waves of heat, as if internal organs were being boiled with filthy blood.

Kemp was about to throw up, yet that guy was enjoying himself more with each slash.

This was probably a cognitive dissonance.

Bologue thought of himself as a normal person. Besides some peculiar little habits, he considered his mental state quite healthy.

Keeping a strict schedule, rarely drinking or smoking, he seldom used violence against others except when striking down evil with a heavy hand...

As Bologue emotionlessly smashed a thug's head, it wasn't that he was without emotion; he was just pondering matters related to Aimou.

Bologue thought situations like this were quite common, akin to how some people like to ponder while taking a walk. Bologue just replaced walking with battling enemies.

Unable to think of any answers, he could only vent all his frustrations into reality.

From the thugs' perspective, they were indeed well-equipped, with various alchemy armaments emerging one after another, posing some trouble even for Bologue.

But Bologue was no longer the newcomer he once was. To say nothing of Condensers, he even smashed a Prayer Believer to death with his own hands.

With the enhancement of Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, Bologue's style became more reckless compared to his previous caution. A legion of snakes protected Bologue, blocking flames and gunfire, transforming into solid armor and deadly sharp swords.

But soon Bologue realized a problem: even with such brutal assaults, the thugs did not retreat; instead, they became more frenzied.

Bologue excelled at spreading fear among others. He had witnessed many collapse under fear, even cultists of the Corrupted Ape Sect. But these thugs were different, as if they couldn't feel fear or had no rational existence at all.

Was something influencing these thugs?

As Bologue pondered this, a cold bullet struck him, bursting blood flowers on his arm, with bones and flesh intertwined, and the Snake Scale Armor shattered into countless silver sparks.

Regular bullets couldn't penetrate Bologue's defense; this was an alchemy warhead.

Bologue summoned the muddy ground beneath his feet, raising an earthen wall to cover his body. However, another bullet fell, easily piercing the wall. The wall's obstruction didn't precisely hit Bologue, but the ether on the warhead continued to surge.

An explosion erupted instantly, scorching firelight flared up suddenly, dark smoke covering Bologue's position. It turned out to be an explosive warhead.

Bologue burst out from the dark smoke, his broken bones resetting, blood flowing backward, and muscles regrowing.

In the blink of an eye, Bologue's injuries healed completely, without the slightest pause. Another series of earthen walls rose from the ground, layer by layer surrounding Bologue.

All the earthen walls faced the same direction, for that's where the gunfire came from, and where the shooter was hiding.

"How have you survived until now?"

This was the first time Bologue asked a question since the battle began.

"Ethereal Concealment. We are Condensers of the Origin School; it's easy for us to hide our tracks."  
Shelley's voice echoed in his mind.

Bologue understood what she meant. The gunman could determine his location through the earth wall; the opponent must be extremely sensitive to Ether, and possibly even possessed Ethereal Perception.

He couldn't see Bologue, but he could sense Bologue's Ether, thus locating his position.

Kemp and Shelley survived largely because the enclosed building and Ethereal Barrier impeded the lethal shots, and Ethereal Concealment obscured their Ether reaction, keeping them silent in the gunman's view.

"Did you encounter his gunfire before?" Bologue asked again.

"No, we only know the opponent has Condensers, but not the specifics of their abilities. It's always these raiders bombarding us." Kemp replied, adding that if he knew relevant information, he'd report to Bologue as soon as he arrived at the battlefield.

Regrettably, the two were passive from the start and didn't acquire any useful intelligence, worsening the situation.

"Sorry."

Kemp apologized again; this was probably the day he apologized the most in his life.

"It's not your fault... this is a trap."

Bologue stated a conclusion no one anticipated. Instantly, everyone connected to the Heart Core Net became alert.

"What did you say? Bologue." Yas inquired.

"These raiders aren't influenced by fear. I can only speculate that something more powerful restrains them, driving them to attack me fearlessly. Logically, with such a group of madmen wielding Alchemy Armaments, you two should have died long ago.

Yet here you are, alive and well, despite being somewhat disheveled, still holding out until I arrived."

"He wants to catch us all in one fell swoop." Shelley said.

"All in one fell swoop? Isn't that too arrogant? The Order Bureau is the real sovereign here. Such actions will only anger the Order Bureau."

Bologue conveyed his thoughts.

"I think he was waiting for me."

"Why do you think so, Bologue?" Yas countered.

"I'm not sure. It's just instinct. After all, in the Great Rift area, I'm the only one who can arrive the fastest to provide support."

Bologue analyzed.

"You could leave; under no circumstances can the opponent's aim be fulfilled," Kemp suddenly spoke, doing his utmost to minimize sacrifice. "I can hold him off."

"Hmm? This is the contradiction I've been pondering. Who exactly does he intend to kill?"

Bologue disregarded Kemp, speaking to himself.

"Is he aiming to kill reinforcements from the Great Rift or Bologue Lazarus?"

"Does it make any difference?" Shelley shouted, beginning to think Bologue was truly insane.

"It makes a difference, a significant difference..."

Bologue paused abruptly as an Alchemy Warhead pierced the wall, precisely striking his torso. He couldn't conceal his Ethereal Fluctuation; even through layers of earth walls, Bologue's position remained clear in the gunman's eyes.

"Bologue!"

Kemp shouted. He saw the figure fall behind the earthen wall; this guy just died like that.

Complex emotions surged within Kemp; he couldn't fathom today's events unfolding this way. Yet before he could feel any grief, the familiar voice rang again.

"You see, this is where the contradiction lies."

Under the ghostly gazes of the two, Bologue leisurely stood up from the ground, speaking with bewilderment.

"If the goal was to assassinate Bologue Lazarus, he must know who I am and possess my basic information, thus understanding such assassination is ineffective."

Snake scales crawled over Bologue's body, forming solid Iron Armor that wrapped him in layers.

"If the aim was to kill reinforcements from the Great Rift, then he's unlucky. Today's a rest day; only I'm on duty."

Serpents gathered in his hand, twisting into a silver-white Long Spear, his entire muscle tensed like a stretched bow.

At the moment of the second gunshot, the Ether inside Bologue surged, ferocious energy bestowed Protection on his arm, Ethereal Amplification reaching its peak.

With full force, Bologue hurled the Iron Spear in the direction of the gunfire, followed by blinding sparks and shattering metal at his Scale Armor chest.

## Chapter 252: Unknown Enemy

The heavy warhead hit the bullseye, and Bologue's body uncontrollably leaned backward. Even with the protection of Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid and Iron-Repelling Armor, the gunshot still felt too heavy.

The alchemy warhead seemed to be imbued with the power to penetrate all matter, collapsing layers of metal and exploding a bloody hole in Bologue's chest, where countless blood mists scattered amidst the mangled flesh.

In an instant, the splattering blood mist froze in mid-air, as if time had reversed, they all repositioned, reorganizing the wound.

"He is an Undead!"

Kemp nearly screamed; he recalled the rumor that the Special Operations Group had a Debtor burdened with immortality. He never expected to meet him here, especially in such a manner.

Then he understood Bologue's words; Bologue was unkillable, and the other's attempt to hunt him seemed absurd.

As Bologue was hit, the Iron Spear in his hand was flung. The mist interfered with Bologue's sight, and the opponent seemed distant, making it impossible to detect any Ethereal Fluctuation. He suspected Ethereal Concealment could be hiding the enemy's trace.

He could only roughly estimate the trajectory's direction and threw the Iron Spear to retaliate; under the Ethereal Amplification's blessing, Bologue's spear pierced through the fog easily.

Soon after, a heavy echo came.

Bologue was fully vigilant about the gunfire; by contrast, these remaining marauders posed little threat as they were merely a guise.

With this in mind, a swarm of snakes gathered in Bologue's hand, forming a Flying Knife, which he then hurled toward several moving figures.

The cold metal sliced through the air, precisely hitting several marauders' feet, causing them to fall into the mud, losing their mobility.

Bologue needed a few alive; he needed to understand what was happening.

From some unknown time, the silent Great Rift seemed to be nurturing something, conspiracy and eerie linger here, waiting for the madness to break free.

Bologue liked to immerse his perspective in others, thinking from the other side's viewpoint to find the combat's winning chance.

But everything encountered today gave Bologue an unusually strange feeling. He couldn't comprehend the enemy's motive; if they intended to hunt Field Staff, the shooter should have killed Kemp and Shelley earlier.

To draw out reinforcements and capture all at once?

That's even less likely; within Opus, apart from the old rival King's Secret Sword, few could contend with the entire action team.

The nearest reinforcements?

Currently, the Order Bureau has only two action groups on duty in the Great Rift, and the mysterious Fourth Group is clearly not among them, so it could only be himself.

The setup must be targeting himself.

Why him? Hunting an Undead? That sounds too futile.

This perplexity did not confine Bologue for long; Bologue believed that everyone's actions brought intense purpose, now no exception.

The mysterious adversary certainly harbors some purpose; he just doesn't yet understand what the conspiracy is.

But Bologue knows that, if the guess is correct, he has already stepped into it.

"Yas, how long until you arrive... this matter is more complicated than I thought."

Bologue stood alone in the fog, with earth walls collapsing around him, exposing his figure.

"What are you doing?" Shelley didn't understand Bologue's move; this undoubtedly exposed himself to the shooter.

"Let him see me."

Bologue rarely addressed Shelley's query, but it seemed more like speaking to Yas.

"See if he'll continue shooting or retreat," Bologue stared at the gloomy front, "I would prefer him to continue aiming at me."

After a brief confusion, Shelley understood Bologue's intention.

Bologue had come to rescue the two, his primary task being to protect Kemp and Shelley. If Bologue rashly pursued the shooter, it might be a diversion, waiting for Bologue to leave before enemies emerge from the shadows, surrounding the two.

Even if Bologue speculated that Kemp and Shelley were bait, the diversion possibility is small, but Bologue couldn't bet their lives so easily.

Thus the situation reached a deadlock, with Bologue unable to pursue and the shooter having free rein. Once choosing to leave, Bologue would lose all pursuit possibilities.

Now Bologue must make himself bait, tempting the shooter to continue firing.

Meanwhile, Bologue is still pondering, what significance lies in hunting an Undead?

"We're here! I sensed your ethereal fluctuation and will arrive in no more than two minutes," Yas's voice rang out.

Is this what it means to be the head of the Violence Suppression Action Group? Even from so far away, Yas could detect my ether response. It's hard to imagine how sensitive he must be to ether flows.

"Two minutes, can you manage?" Bologue retorted.

"We can," Kemp understood Bologue's meaning, "it's just two minutes, no matter what happens, we can hold on."

Kemp and Shelley, like Bologue, were recently transferred newcomers to the Field Operations Department. The early work for newcomers was always fraught with difficulty.

Having made a mistake and forcing the team leader to come to the rescue had already made Kemp feel deeply ashamed. He and Shelley were determined not to drag their feet anymore, even though Bologue had originally planned to save them.

Since throwing the Iron Spear, there were no further gunshots. Bologue didn't believe he had hit the enemy; it was more like the enemy had retreated.

Bologue didn't intend to let the enemy off so easily. Once Yas arrived, he could give his all in this confrontation.

Taking the ether flow goggles out of his pocket, Bologue was unsure of the device's observation distance and precision. In this environment, he wasn't sure to what extent it was effective, but for now, it was his only means of tracking the enemy.

After a brief delay, the goggles presented a vivid hue before Bologue's eyes. There was some imaging delay with the ether flow goggles, but Bologue only needed a rough direction.

A deep blue point of light appeared at the far end of his vision.

Without any hesitation, Bologue sprinted toward the direction of the light point. As he advanced, a strong ether reaction emanated from the other side of the mist.

Bologue knew it was Yas, loudly proclaiming his arrival, similar to firing a gunshot during a robbery. Whoever intended to harm his team members would face his wrath.

Thinking of this, Bologue oddly felt a bit regretful. He actually wished the enemy was more formidable, enough to challenge him. That way, he could witness the combat style of the Origin School's Condensers and personally see Yas's "Silence" and "Prohibition."

It's said that it's one of the rare methods to "kill" the Undead.

Suddenly Bologue's thoughts froze. He felt as if he caught the tail end of a clue, frantically tracing it upwards, but no matter how he tried, he couldn't construct a logical chain.

The Origin School could kill him, as long as they placed him in an absolute ether vacuum, depleting all his ether and Soul Shards...

Bologue quickened his pace. He needed to know who his enemy was.

The King's Secret Sword?

Unlikely, as Bologue had killed everyone on the list but the King of First Seal during the stormy night, unless they had some unknown method of transmitting his information.

The Scarlet Corruption Sect?

Regarding this strange, evil sect, Bologue held little confidence. His chest still bore the mark of a woman's hand, but Bologue thought if the Scarlet Corruption Sect was targeting him, he shouldn't be up against these thugs, and the Ninth Group would certainly be aware.

The situation had become increasingly complex and bizarre, as if another unfamiliar player had entered this chaotic chessboard.

Bologue passed through thick mist and countless twisted buildings, seeing damaged walls and the Iron Spear embedded in the rubble, emitting a faint azure glow stained with traces of blood.

Reaching to touch the Iron Spear, its solid form collapsed, transforming into a swarm of soft snakes crawling back into Bologue's hand.

Judging from the bloodstains left, Bologue had grazed the gunman. It took him by surprise, as when he threw the Iron Spear, he hadn't expected to hit the gunman at all.

It seemed Bologue's talent for throwing things was better than he himself had thought—he hit the gunman even from such a distance without a definite target.

Just at this moment, Bologue noticed a bright glint in the dim light, resembling a metallic tripwire.

This was indeed a tripwire!

In the long war of Scorched Earth Fury, Bologue had dismantled countless of these damned things before. This was a trap; he hadn't hit the gunman at all. The deception was deliberately crafted to mislead him.

In the instant Bologue realized this, violent ether surged beneath his feet. The dense Scale Armor protected Bologue's body, but the anticipated explosion didn't occur. Instead, a dark green mist continuously arose from beneath.

The green mist carried potent corrosiveness. The instant it touched the Scale Armor, the metal seemed to dissolve like in strong acid, tiny bubbles bursting with piercing screeches.

The Scale Armor could withstand explosions but couldn't block the penetration of green mist. Upon contact with flesh, intense pain surged from the skin. Bologue inadvertently inhaled a breath, as if flames seared his respiratory tract, making thick blood and flesh stick together, leaving him unable to breathe.

Fragile eyes met the mist, turning Bologue's sockets into a mess of blood, and his vision slipped into darkness. Gunshots followed, alchemical warheads easily piercing all matter along their path, creating a huge void in Bologue's chest.

At this point, Bologue lost all strength, collapsing onto the ground like a corpse, motionless.

Nearby, in the shadows, Gray, clad in light-dispersing concealment gear, hoisted a sniper rifle, withdrew a short knife from his waist, and cautiously approached Bologue's motionless form.

## Chapter 253: Employee Benefits

For Gray, this period felt like a mad and seductive dream. As a newly inducted member of the King's Secret Sword, he followed the squad to the mysterious and eerie Oubos within the Oath City.

Before facing powerful enemies and fierce battles, Gray's trusted captain, Jia Meng, suddenly betrayed him. To save him, Milasha died right before his eyes... Gray had even thought of inviting her over after the mission. He really liked Milasha.

Everything crashed down like a storm in front of him. After the baptism, the once slightly naive Gray was no more; replaced by a puppet controlled by hatred and anger.

Gray gazed at the decaying bodies in the green mist. He devised many plans for hunting the undead, and this toxic mist was one of them. Aside from its extremely high cost, it had virtually no flaws.

Heavy breathing echoed from beneath the gas mask. Gray didn't dare get too close to the green mist; even protective masks could be corroded by it. Luckily, its duration wasn't long and would soon naturally dissipate.

The corpse within the green mist made no response, showing signs that Bologue was indeed rendered powerless by the toxic mist's demise. Gray even saw faint glimpses of white bones.

Yet, he didn't relax his vigilance; with a short knife in one hand and a handgun in the other, he slowly approached, trying to ascertain Bologue's condition.

The vision gradually cleared, as if time was speeding up on Bologue's body; flesh was rotten beyond recognition, with pus and blood mixed together, emitting a gut-churning stench.

Upon closer inspection, amidst the decaying flesh, there appeared a hint of silver-white...

Gray instinctively pulled the trigger; the bullets pierced into the rotten flesh, but erupted in a metallic clang.

Only then did he discover a thin layer of decayed flesh beneath, was a vague humanoid form made of earth and metal, followed by intense pain coursing through his foot. Cold spikes instantly pierced through Gray's foot, then twisted into iron thorns, spreading as dense iron spikes emerged from beneath his skin.

Gray fell backward, enduring the intense pain to tear off the iron thorns. At the same time, he noticed the direction of the ether flow, seeing the ground not far away rise and crack as the slightly disheveled Bologue slowly stood up, chest flesh slowly writhing and healing the wounds.

Thanks to days of training, Bologue's creations shaped by the secret energy became increasingly vivid. Now, the replicas he created, under proper conditions, could even pass as genuine.

But the feeling of stealth underground was truly awful; he felt like a mole.

"As a hunter, you still lack steadiness."

Bologue didn't expect his own mistake could so easily lure Gray out. It seemed the opponent was a novice, simply relying on an abundance of alchemy armaments.

Gray gazed shockingly at Bologue. Though the Delusional had repeatedly warned him, and he had made ample preparation ahead of time, when truly confronting Bologue, this guy was only more troublesome than imagined.

Had it not been for his quick movements, perhaps he would've already been pierced through the heart by iron thorns.

He stumbled to move while casting out a smoke bomb, releasing thick mist that obscured Bologue's field of vision.

Gray knew the operation had failed; he must find a way to escape. At this moment, he feared not death, but hoped to kill Jia Meng personally before dying.

It was for this purpose he continued to act, even driven by the Delusional.

Pulling out syringes from his waist, he stabbed them fiercely into his thigh; in brief moments, the intense pain vanished, and Gray dragged his injured foot, swiftly fleeing along the pre-planned route.

The thick mist didn't delay Bologue for long; one iron spear after another pierced through the fog, pinning down behind Gray without hitting him.

Bologue frowned, attempting to catch up with Gray, but his pace was evidently slower, even as the Undying Body. Healing the toxin and the massive wound took time, causing ethereal amplification.

Gray was a tricky adversary; he seemed well-acquainted with Bologue, meticulously prepared, riddled with alchemy armaments. Without those troublesome alchemy armaments, Bologue felt the fight would have ended long ago.

Coughing forcefully a few times, large chunks of foul blood expelled, easing Bologue greatly.

Honestly, this was his first experience in such a battle; the opponent was like a nouveau riche with endless alchemy armaments.

Reflecting on his own frugality in combat, Bologue actually felt a bit envious of the other.

Gray's figure disappeared from sight; judging by the attire he wore, it should've been an alchemy armament that blended his figure with the environment, an immensely convenient disguise within the dark Great Rift.

Even Bologue couldn't sense Gray's ether reaction; despite possessing ether flow goggles, pursuit seemed exceedingly difficult when the opponent solely aimed to escape.

Fortunately, experts always prepare comprehensively.

A silver-white trail appeared across the sky; a slender, fluid-like silver filament drifted slowly, originating from Bologue's hand, stretching into the deep rift.

The Summoning Hand had a maximum range, yet within his own cast scope, continuously shaping threads to extend it, coupled with the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid's excellent ether extensibility, Bologue left a beacon on Gray's body while wounding him.

Taking a breath, Bologue released a large amount of ether along the filament, the silver-white filament glowing with blue light, a blue trajectory manifesting out of thin air.

"Found you."

Bologue whispered, Ethereal Amplification enveloping his body, and in an instant, his speed surged, chasing Gray along the Cyan Trail's guidance.

Entering the Great Rift, he flung the grappling hook, maneuvering between cliff walls.

With his leg injured like that, Gray shouldn't be able to run far. However, Bologue had been in pursuit for so long, and the cyan trail still extended forward.

It's conceivable, this guy has already taken out so many alchemy armaments, even those pain-neglecting alchemy potions could be considered normal.

Bologue suspected Gray was a member of the Gray Trade Association. Kemp and Shelley were used as bait when investigating the Gray Trade Association, and considering Gray's gear, the possibility that he's from the Gray Trade Association greatly increased.

But what Bologue didn't understand was why the Gray Trade Association would design to hunt him down. Moreover, the still perplexing point for Bologue was that he was unkillable. What was the significance of their actions?

Bologue believed that there must be their own intention behind it, only he couldn't guess at it yet.

The cyan trail continually extended into the Wandering Crossroads. Bologue stepped onto the derelict streets, stopped slightly, and the cyan trail ended here, suggesting Gray had noticed this.

Apparently, he had lost Gray, but perhaps Gray was nearby, this being his last known position.

Bologue's gaze swept across the street and landed not far away, countless cables entangled on the skewed buildings, neon lights of different colors flickering continuously.

Gray silhouettes stood beneath the buildings, chatting, drinking, and reveling.

Bologue walked towards the neon lights, reaching out to push open the door of the Web Bar.

The din inside was unending, night and day indistinct here, making the merriment ceaseless. Just as before, the patrons changed again and again, but Vika always stood behind the bar, silently wiping glasses or pocketing the debts handed over by others.

Bologue only later learned of Vika's significant status within Wandering Crossroads—this bar also served as a place for transactions, where many from Wandering Crossroads came for covert dealings, and when needed, Vika would lend Mammon Coins, acting as the creditor for many.

Approaching the bar, Bologue did not order a drink to start a conversation as he usually did, but directly asked, with a tone carrying deadly intent.

"I'm chasing a person, his leg is injured, have you seen him?" Bologue asked.

"No."

Vika straightforwardly shook his head. Despite their proximity, he could easily smell the scent of blood on Bologue, yet his expression remained unchanged.

This scene Vika had long been accustomed to, even if someone died right before him, it was a quite ordinary occurrence for him.

"How much do I have to pay for this? I know the rules here, everything has a value." Bologue spoke again.

"Value?"

Vika paused his movement, glanced at Bologue, then smiled and shook his head.

"The premise of payment is that there must be such goods on the shelf... I know nothing. If you wish, I can invite you for a drink."

Bologue betrayed no concealment of the murderous intent in his gaze, but Vika was indifferent. Such looks were common for him, he grew accustomed to them long ago.

"Aren't you afraid?" Bologue asked.

"Afraid of what? My employee benefits are quite nice."

Vika made a statement that sounded meaningless, but Bologue knew what he meant.

Violent coercion wouldn't work with Vika; he was the embodiment of that evil will, the Tyrant's most loyal employee. Bologue knew he wouldn't obtain intel about Gray from Vika, yet he didn't turn to leave, instead posing another question.

"You... and this Wandering Crossroads, are actually a different form of faith to your employer, aren't you?"

Faced with Bologue's inquiry, Vika maintained his smile and remained silent.

Bologue took a deep look at this bartender, and as he prepared to turn and leave, Vika called out to him.

"Wait, Bologue."

Turning back, Vika placed a Mammon Coin on the counter, pressing his index finger on it, pushing it toward Bologue.

"Congratulations, you've become a legend."

As his index finger moved away, Bologue saw a Mercury symbol engraved on the Mammon Coin.

## Chapter 254: Secret Agreement

Bologue recognized this symbol, as mentioned in the "Golden Thesis," it symbolizes certain things, and the Mammon Coin before his eyes is engraved with the symbol representing silver.

"What are you talking about?"

Bologue looked at Vika warily. It was Vika who initially explained the various aspects of the Mammon Coin to him, so Bologue clearly understood what Vika meant by "becoming a legend."

Back then, Bologue might have been extremely interested in these things, but after learning the identity of the Tyrant, his heart was filled with endless caution.

"You understand what I mean; you've become one of them, even though you may not want to admit it, the fact remains."

Vika maintained the perfect smile on his face, his words resonating with a sinister echo.

"This land remembers your name, even if everyone else forgets, someone knows of your existence."

Bologue's image froze in place, the surrounding clamor seemingly unrelated to him, within the silence, only he and Vika stared at each other.

"Will you accept it?" Vika asked.

The Mammon Coin lay between the two of them, should Bologue choose to accept this Mammon Coin, his connection with the Tyrant would deepen, perhaps even allowing him to call upon the Tyrant's help when necessary.

If refused, nothing would happen; compared to the Crimson Queen, the Tyrant is a rare, reasonable fellow. Yet, even so, the more rational the Tyrant became, the more Bologue felt he was facing the Abyss, even struggling to guess what he might be thinking.

"If I accept it, will you tell me the information about that person?" Bologue countered.

Vika showed a confused expression, then explained, "Sorry, I truly know nothing."

"With your position at the Wandering Crossroads, this claim sounds too much like a lie, doesn't it?"

"Then consider it a lie," Vika said with a surprising candidness.

This time, it was Bologue who fell silent, analyzing in his thoughts, realizing that the Wandering Crossroads were but a variant of the Tyrant's sect of beliefs, he understood the relationships here were intricate.

The Gray Trade Association and the Sanguine Sect, all the unknown and mysterious connections were associated, and all these events unfolded within the Great Rift and related to the Wandering Crossroads.

Given the Tyrant's nearly omnipotent power, he ought to know everything occurring here, and as his loyal servant, Vika does too.

"Your boss also highly values them, doesn't he?" Bologue remarked casually, even with a trace of a smile, "Looks like I'm not the only one favored by the Devil."

For many years, the Tyrant has been searching for someone.

Bologue didn't know whether that person had a deep enmity with the Tyrant or owed the Tyrant a substantial debt, whatever the reason, anyone that drew such significant attention from the Tyrant had a special nature, and as for Bologue, he seemed to share similarities with that person or perhaps be linked.

In the Tyrant's eyes, Bologue himself might be the clue to finding that person.

But now, there is a larger interest tempting the Tyrant enough for him to care for the other party, even if Bologue pledged something, he might still disregard it.

Bologue's tone feigned jealousy, but mostly it was still caution, as those favored by the Devi truly weren't innocent.

Vika continued to smile gently, shaking his head silently, negating all Bologue's guesses.

Bologue knew further entanglement here was meaningless, casting a deep glance at Vika before making a move that somewhat surprised Vika.

Reaching out to pick up the engraved Mammon Coin signifying silver, Bologue said nothing, pocketed it, and turned to leave.

On a stormy night, Bologue had refused the Tyrant's gift, only because Bologue thought it would be his last chance; he didn't want any more entanglements with the Devil.

But destiny is like this, seemingly predetermined, and Nesanel's subsequent words changed Bologue's thoughts somewhat, in addition to everything recent that had transpired.

With the connection of the umbilical, Bologue could keenly sense the powers related to the Devil, yet he still felt as though standing behind a thin veil, struggling to see what was hidden beneath.

Unless... Unless Bologue delved deeper further.

Bologue knew it was akin to dancing with wolves, yet only by doing so, could he find these wolves hidden within the deep forest and twist each of their throats.

Pushing open the bar's door, the jovial atmosphere on the street vanished, replaced by depth and oppression.

The drunken people woke up one by one, warily watching the man standing not far away, some even gripped weapons, but none dared to make the first move.

Bologue looked toward the figure that made everyone vigilant, unsurprised by his appearance, given his sensitivity to the flow of Ether, tracking Bologue's footprints couldn't be simpler for him.

Yas saw Bologue emerge from the bar too, a flash in his eyes, nodding in acknowledgement to Bologue.

"Where are the others?" Bologue asked.

"I sent them directly to Qiushang Town; from there, they can directly return to the 'Cultivation Room,' " Yas said.

Yas had come from the route from Qiushang Town, impatient for his new group members.

"Actually, I thought you'd make an entrance like they did—isn't it called Curved Path Breakthrough?"

Bologue joked; not long ago, he had watched the Ninth Group's dazzling debut and assumed every task force would be equipped with such power.

"That thing is extremely risky and can only be used under special circumstances," Yas replied.

"Rescuing team members doesn't count as special?" Bologue retorted.

"Special, but not quite special enough. Without your reinforcement, we might have activated it," Yas spoke with rare courtesy towards Bologue, which made him uneasy.

"Seems like you didn't catch that guy."

The two paced down the street of Wandering Fork, Yas whispered.

"Wandering Fork is sheltering him... He should be part of the Gray Trade Association," Bologue revealed the information he had gathered.

"I suspect it's a trap, a trap aimed at me. Do you know anything?" Bologue continued to ask.

"Hmm... This is a task the Sixth Group has been handling lately. With Gray Trade Association's arrival, a lot of Alchemy Armament has flowed into the market, causing a group of thugs to rally, and under the enhancement of Alchemy Armament, they have become extremely dangerous."

Yas began explaining the task-related information to Bologue.

"We are responsible for subduing these thugs and retrieving the Alchemy Armament. Kemp and Shelley are newly joined members, so we've entrusted them with the simplest tasks, instructing them to gather intelligence and confirm the thugs' locations.

If this is a trap targeting you, then it doesn't seem like they messed up but were targeted from the beginning."

"The opponent anticipated it in advance—a task so simple wouldn't warrant sending High Tier Condensers, would it?" Bologue muttered.

"Possibly."

Bologue fell silent, still unable to ascertain the gunman's identity, having only fragmented information to deduce his identity.

He might be affiliated with the Gray Trade Association or merely hired by them, or perhaps just a wealthy individual who acquired various Alchemy Armament from the Association.

But all these conflicting sources point to one question: What was he thinking, attempting to assassinate an Undead? This absurd act remained unfathomable to Bologue.

"I left some of them alive; did you notice?" Bologue said.

"The thugs? Noticed. They should be alongside my team members, being escorted back to the Cultivation Room." Yas understood Bologue's intent and continued, "If the opponent wants to hide, they wouldn't leave such obvious flaws."

"However, regardless, we can glean some intelligence from these thugs," Bologue wouldn't overlook any clues.

At this point in the conversation, Bologue paused, scrutinizing Yas as if recalling something.

"You are friends with my leader, Lebius, right?" Bologue suddenly asked.

"What do you want to ask?"

The abrupt topic shift immediately heightened Yas's guard.

"I want to ask some personal questions... like, do you know about his relationship with Vika?"

Initially, Bologue connected with Vika through Lebius, indicating that his leader had intricate ties with this enigmatic land, which he hadn't visited in years.

"Since I've observed the strangeness here, I believe you should have noticed it early on, too? So why is everyone indifferent, allowing this Land of Chaos to grow unruly?"

Bologue pressed, needing clarity on why the Order Bureau seemed to disregard Wandering Fork.

"The relationships are complex, Bologue, especially concerning certain crucial secrets..."

We've always adhered to such conduct—there are secrets that shouldn't be disclosed, but for those overly curious, we won't prevent you from pursuing those secrets."

Yas paused for a few seconds before continuing.

"Much like children playing with fire, once burned, many things become clear, and our adult words are no longer necessary."

Just as Bologue thought he might leave disappointed, Yas shifted his tone and continued.

"Excluded from those unutterable, there are indeed some secrets I can share with you.

Lebius and Vika's friendship began during the secret war; back then, we battled the King's Secret Sword in every city's shadow, including the Great Rift."

At this point, Bologue had grasped the situation, speaking softly.

"You made a pact with Wandering Fork, causing them to align with you during the secret war."

Yas neither confirmed nor denied, merely staring at Bologue impassively.

Chapter 255: Wish

Watching Bologue leave, Vika's smiling expression gradually cooled down, then another wilder and more fervent smile appeared on his face, with a touch of madness.

Vika, who was always steady and rational, was unimaginable in such a state, like a madman.

He hummed a tune, muttering to himself, "Mr. Lazarus, you're still not attentive to details, did you miss even this?"

Vika casually placed the wine glass aside, the glass wobbled, rolling on the bar, then shattered to pieces.

The piercing shattering sound caught the attention of many people, they all looked at Vika with surprise in their eyes, seemingly the first time Vika had broken a glass since everyone's known him.

Vika paid no mind to the broken glass, not even glancing at it, his demeanor completely changed, as if his inner soul had switched.

Taking steps towards the shadowy doorway, as he approached, a strong scent of blood seeped through the door crack, with faint traces of blood on the floor.

Opening the door, in the dimness, Vika saw the figure leaning in the corner, just like the first time he came here, covered in blood and in a wretched state.

Gray gasped painfully, as the potion's effect waned, excruciating pain shot up from his leg, with not only the flesh torn but the bones riddled with cracks.

He tore open the outer layer of his pants, exposing the bloody leg, not caring about Vika's gaze, he picked up the medical kit's supplies, tending to his wound like a beast licking its wounds.

Vika leaned against the door, arms crossed, watching Gray.

"You were almost discovered."

"But you covered for me."

Gray, with his head down, did not look at Vika, his voice seemingly calm, but a sharp knife lay hidden in the shadows beneath him, ready for a desperate fight.

"So... what price does this entail?"

After a brief silence, Gray's voice sounded again.

Having lived in this labyrinthine route for some time, he was well aware of the rules here, where sudden kindness was nonexistent, only costs to be paid.

Vika had covered for him, a price was needed, yet unclear what he must pay.

It could be little, or it could be a lot, but Gray no longer cared, stepping into the vortex meant dying midway or reaching the end, with no third path.

Laughter echoed.

Gray lifted his head, looking at the man by the door, the room dim, and him against the outside light, becoming a dark silhouette, shadows making Gray feel locked in by countless eyes.

A golden coin was tossed to Gray by Vika, catching it, a Mammon Coin now rested in his hand, with endless threads entwining, as if nurturing something.

"Every pattern represents a legend, and this pattern appears the most often..." Vika's voice drifted.

"The more frequent the pattern, the more known the legend is to everyone." Gray responded softly.

"What do you think this pattern represents?"

Fingers gently rubbed the coin's surface, carrying an almost magical glow, even in the darkness emitting a golden shimmer.

"You... and this Web Bar."

Gray's eyes filled with blood, constant pain tearing at his nerves, but by now he was becoming accustomed to enduring it.

In this period, he'd essentially lived under Vika's protection, realizing with time Vika's enigmatic status in this maze-like path, garnering everyone's respect, and upon entering the bar, chaos ceased, replaced by a silent order adhered to by all.

In this labyrinthine route, Vika was like a legendary presence, everyone living here needed his help, convincing Gray that the pattern represented Vika.

"How could it be?"

Vika smiled, shaking his head, denying Gray's assumption.

"Sometimes legend doesn't refer to a specific person, it could be an unforgettable event, or a mysterious phenomenon."

"What are you trying to say?" Gray grew wary.

"It represents a rule."

Vika spread his hands, raising his voice, "Pay tribute to the Tyrant, and in return, you receive the Tyrant's protection."

The labyrinthine route never had a clear owner, if one were to say who ruled here, it would be the Tyrant spoken of in tales, a being of legend found only in stories, despite all the singing, Gray hadn't found a shred of the Tyrant in the labyrinthine route.

Gray, like many, regarded the Tyrant as an odd tale passed through time.

"Are you crazy?" Gray found Vika peculiar today, as if he were a different person, "Do you have some kind of multiple personality disorder?"

To this, Vika merely laughed heartily, not hiding anything, immediately stating frankly,

"Gray, do you know what holds the most value?"

Gray couldn't fathom such things, value varied for everyone, some could be bought with gold, others saw it as dust.

Out of curiosity, Gray still asked softly.

"What is the most valuable thing?"

"The deepest desires and most delusional wishes of humankind, these primal forces intertwining, compelling humans to make choices, they produce different values based on those choices."

Vika's voice carried a note of enchantment, immersed in such beauty.

"Just like the choices people make when facing disaster, some choose self-deception, while others courageously step forward, revealing the value of their soul."

"Do choices determine our value?" Gray asked.

Vika did not provide a clear answer to this, only speaking in a more fervent tone.

"Gray, I like things of value, but what I like more is witnessing the creation of value firsthand, watching you make the right choices in dire straits."

Whether it was an illusion or something else, Gray vaguely saw scarlet hundred-eyed shadows slowly opening in the darkness, each eye reflecting a madness that shattered sanity.

"Even more wonderful is that you're standing on blessed ground here, where all wishes will come true."

"As long as you're willing to pay the appropriate price."

Gray whispered, feeling like a small boat sailing on the sea, overshadowed by a massive dark shape.

"So that's why you're willing to help me, help the Delusional, right?"

Gray seemed to understand Vika's purpose, as if Vika had a sort of foresight, seeing every choice people would make in the near future, waiting expectantly for that scene like an audience in the amphitheater.

To hasten the birth of all this, the stingy presence did not mind offering a little assistance.

"I'm watching you all."

Vika suddenly uttered this inexplicable sentence, then fell silent, the madness gradually dissipating from his aura.

Gray could distinctly perceive this change. Vika at the door moved aside, a slight light illuminating his face, showing a hint of confusion, but like one having a brief memory lapse and then recalling everything, he nodded self-consciously and looked at Gray.

"Are you alright?"

The voice was calm and steady, once again reverting to the Vika Gray was familiar with.

"You're not truly experiencing a split personality, are you?"

Gray started to struggle to understand Vika; the transformation was too abrupt, the personality difference too stark, as though two souls resided within his shell.

"No, my boss just came by. He always likes this, arriving silently and then leaving suddenly."

Vika was long accustomed to this and did not plan to explain anything to Gray. After confirming Gray's status, he closed the door, and darkness enveloped everything.

Some fear darkness, but for Gray, it made him feel particularly at ease, as though he was being protected by the darkness itself.

He slowly lay down, the combat and agony making him exhausted, and his consciousness grew drowsy. Just as he was about to drift into sleep, a noise of static electricity sounded, and a touch of red light flared in the darkness. Gray quickly woke up and reached for the communicator in the corner.

"How did it go?"

The voice rang in his ear, distorted and piercing from the interference.

"He's a genuine Undead. I used all the alchemy equipment you gave me on him—whether it was gunfire or poison, injuries of that severity could easily kill a Prayer Believer, but on him, it merely restricted his movement a little. He needed only a short time to get back on his feet."

Gray's voice carried a hint of dread, as it was his first time facing an Undead, and Bologue showed him a sufficiently terrifying suppression.

Like an indestructible Evil Spirit, all your means only extend your remaining life. Without Vika's protection, Gray even thought he might already be dead.

"Why did you want to kill an Undead?" Gray voiced his confusion, nearly dying because of the other's idea today.

"There are many ways to be Undead. I merely wanted to determine which kind he belonged to."

"And the result?"

"It seems he's the most troublesome kind."

The dreadful pain still reminded Gray of today's events, and he warned, "Unless you have a way to keep him in a state of death... repeatedly killing him, otherwise I can't think of any way to control him."

"Hmm... I understand."

The other was indeed seriously considering it, but Gray found it unbearable, the madness within the Great Rift far exceeding his imagination.

"Who are you then? Delusional, you've designed so much just to test his Undeath? How does that relate to your purpose?"

"Bologue affects our actions; he's like a hunting dog released in the hunting ground while we're the pathetic rabbits."

The Delusional's voice was cold, cruel.

"Whether it's your wish or mine, the prerequisite to achieving all of this is excluding Bologue... excluding the Order Bureau."

Chapter 256: Unity

Order Bureau, Field Operations Department.

After setting up field operations and building a small outpost, Bologue felt that he hadn't been to the "Cultivation Room" for quite some time. Even when he returned, he only handed in some reports and quickly left again.

Sitting in Lebius' office, Bologue felt an almost surreal sense of being transported to another time and place.

Lebius remained unchanged, sitting behind his desk approving documents as if Bologue was completely invisible, while Yuriel served tea and water, looking every bit the part of a caregiver.

Seeing her with that smiling demeanor, Bologue realized that Yuriel's presence in the Special Operations Group was quite faint. She seemed to be ever-present, yet hard to recall in memory.

Yuriel was always this way, quietly taking on many of the tedious tasks for the Special Operations Group. Geoffrey was similar, but he would curse indignantly while handling it all.

This guy had spent a long, leisurely period in the Logistics Department, and seemed somewhat unadjusted upon returning to the Field Operations Department, appearing much more worn compared to when Bologue first met him.

Each action team had a different composition. Some individuals were powerful Negative Power Users, while others were only newcomers as Condensers. The tier differences meant team members faced different levels of task challenges.

Bologue and Palmer took on the basic work of patrolling the Great Rift. Although they had already encountered the Gray Trade Association, the Decay Sect, and other sudden situations since the start of their work, Bologue felt everything was under control.

Thinking about how even his work as a Condenser was so perilous, he wondered what sort of tasks the two Negative Power Users were currently undertaking.

Anyway, with Nesanel's nature, he definitely wouldn't let the two rest.

The room was silent, with only the sound of their breathing and the rustle of turning pages, along with the friction of pen tips on paper.

The corridor outside was also deserted, lending the entire Field Operations Department an air of stillness.

This reminded Bologue of his early days in the Field Operations Department. At that time, he was curious why the Logistics Department was so lively, yet here, hardly anyone was around.

He later learned that each Special Operations Group usually left only a few members in the "Cultivation Room," most of whom were like Yuriel, functioning as communicators, while others were stationed at various outposts or on duty outside.

Bologue recalled voicing his query to Geoffrey, "Even if Opus is vast, it wouldn't deploy all field staff, right?"

"The reach of the Order Bureau isn't limited to Oubos in Oath City," Geoffrey explained. "We span the entire Rhine Alliance, have divisions in many key areas, and sometimes the Special Operations Group traverses the globe."

Geoffrey stated that such situations were uncommon, as the Rhine Alliance encompassed numerous Extraordinary Organizations and Secret Societies. Often, these areas were self-governing, with the Order Bureau acting in more of a supervisory role.

Of course, this only applied to those organizations within the large Extraordinary Alliance that the Order Bureau was part of. Many other Extraordinary Organizations remained outside the Bureau's jurisdiction, and each time these were mentioned, Geoffrey showed signs of frustration and reluctance to elaborate.

However, more exhausting than the organizations outside the alliance were the many disturbances in neutral zones.

The Rhine Alliance and the Kagader Empire dominated the world's poles, separated by numerous neutral countries acting as buffers, where gray zones served as sources of much contention.

Moreover, there were ambiguous groups like the Gray Trade Association that might sometimes benefit you or stab you in the back, or completely chaotic cult groups, like the Decay Sect, bringing nothing but madness without any meaningful contribution to the world.

After thoroughly understanding all this, Bologue realized how daunting it was to govern such a large organization and maintain balance and order amidst such a complex web of powers.

Fortunately, these concerns didn't involve Bologue, as an ordinary field staff member, he didn't have to ponder these vexing issues.

The deeper in conspiracy Bologue found himself, the simpler and more satisfying he found straightforward combat to be, free from complicated matters, it always made for a refreshing task.

The office door opened, and the first person to appear was Geoffrey. He glanced at Bologue, nodded, and following Geoffrey was Yas.

"How's the situation? Any progress?" Bologue asked.

After rescuing Kemp and Shelley, these two newcomers were sent to the Border Sanatorium. On the return journey, Bologue and Yas discussed the various aspects of the conspiracy, leading to the current situation.

Bologue had been waiting here all afternoon, hoping for some new information.

"None," Yas lamented with a sigh.

"Couldn't even Crow's Nest figure anything out?"

Bologue was somewhat surprised; in his perception, Crow's Nest was always a wondrous place where anyone who entered would reveal all under Ivan's interrogation. Yet this time, Crow's Nest seemed to have failed.

"These thugs were all hired by the Contractors," Geoffrey explained. "Even if they were just ordinary people, they were enveloped in the Power of Contract, sourced from the Devil's strength above everything else."

"Blocked by the contract?"

Bologue knew about the Contract School. Rather than a school, it's more like a profession. Contractors summon devils and sign contracts between different wills.

"Yes, these people are no different from the dead. They are more like puppets, completely giving their body and mind to the other party under the constraint of the contract, acting under their command.

Ivan searched through these people's memories; they really are just a group of ordinary thugs. The most crucial memories about the contractors, however, were shrouded in shadows, hard to discern."

Geoffrey continued, "But it's not a complete loss."

"What?" Bologue asked.

"In other circumstances, we would indeed have difficulty determining the motives of these thugs and the contractor behind them. But now, with the appearance of the Gray Trade Association... it's a common tactic they use. If a customer can't pay the price, they allow the customer to pay in another way."

Geoffrey's voice lowered.

"For example, by forming a contract with them to handle something for the Gray Trade Association. Once the task is completed, they're square, but everything during this is restricted by various clauses, and this power comes from the devil."

"These thugs are employed by the Gray Trade Association," Bologue affirmed.

He still remembered the battle when he was pursuing the gunmen, with various alchemy armaments appearing endlessly. Even the field staff of the Order Bureau couldn't afford such lavishness, let alone these questionable individuals.

The conversation fell into silence. Everyone wore a distressed expression, headaches brought on by these mysterious merchants.

"Does the Order Bureau have no records on the Gray Trade Association? We need to at least understand our opponent," Bologue said.

No one responded to Bologue's words. Eyes crossed each other silently until Yas finally spoke.

"The Gray Trade Association acts very mysteriously. Unlike many extraordinary organizations, these guys are like nomads, moving between countries and never lingering long... They are like ships on land, advancing along a course, returning to the Great Rift after a certain period, bringing conflict, and then leaving again."

"Then the Order Bureau should also know some deeper intelligence, right? Or is this information not for me?" Bologue suspiciously looked at everyone.

"It's not that we can't tell you. It just might affect how you see... the image of the Order Bureau," Geoffrey hesitated slightly.

"Image? From the moment you hired me, I had a deep understanding of the organization." Bologue was dismissive.

Claiming to maintain the stability of the extraordinary world and protect human safety, but Bologue understood that the glory of ideals couldn't cover up the true nature of the Order Bureau.

It's a giant entity, one of the most terrifying monsters in this world, a pure violent organ walking in the hazy gray between black and white.

Having any beautiful thoughts about such a presence is really too naive, sounding like something a child would say.

"Everyone's a villain, maybe just slightly more righteous compared to other villains, right?"

Bologue half-joked, understanding that so-called image was just Geoffrey's cover. As he spoke, Geoffrey's gaze was fixed on Lebius, seemingly seeking his consent.

His boss held a position in the Order Bureau and was disabled, seemingly harmless to humans and animals, but in critical decisions, everyone listened to his decisions, whether it was Yas or Geoffrey.

"This involves matters during a secret war, classified as confidential within the Order Bureau. Besides those who experienced the secret war, only some high-ranking employees have the authority to know."

The silent Lebius finally spoke. Yuriel, working beside him, exited the office consciously without anyone stopping her. Her job was just communication, knowing too much wouldn't benefit her. She was aware of this since she started working beside Lebius.

The atmosphere in the room became more oppressive. Bologue glanced at Yas, recalling the secrets he mentioned at the crossroads of hesitation.

"Could it be like the crossroads of hesitation, where to win the secret war, the Order Bureau made agreements with the Gray Trade Association, letting those arms dealers support the Order Bureau?" Bologue asked seriously.

Hearing this, Lebius seemed surprised, then he said.

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"Huh?" Bologue was stunned, then Lebius continued.

"The Gray Trade Association and the crossroads of hesitation are one and the same; that dark, twisted land is the end of these merchants' route."

## Chapter 257: Dispute

The atmosphere in the office was deadly silent, but accurately speaking, it was only Bologue who was silent; both Yas and Geoffrey, having experienced the secret wars, were evidently already aware of this intelligence.

Only Bologue stood stunned on the spot, unable to respond for a moment, appearing somewhat flustered.

"The Gray Trade Association and the Wandering Crossroad are one and the same..."

Bologue murmured softly, then stared straight at Lebius, connecting all the threads together, realizing at this moment what these guys were concealing.

"So... you are also aware of the Tyrant's existence?"

Bologue then looked at Yas and Geoffrey. From Nesanel's words, he had considered that the Order Bureau might also be trading with Devils, but he never expected that it had all started long ago, and judging from their reactions, the closeness between the Order Bureau and the Devils far exceeded his expectations.

"In the secret war, the real ally of the Order Bureau was not the Great Rift, nor the Wandering Crossroad, nor the Gray Trade Association, but the master of all this.

The Tyrant."

"Does it disgust you? The organization you trust the most also has ties with the Devils," Lebius asked calmly.

Bologue didn't respond, instead he pondered in silence, before stating his own thoughts.

"So, like the corrupted sect, in reality, the Gray Trade Association could also be considered a variant of a cult group, and what they serve is the Tyrant, right?"

Bologue pursued the question. To this day, Nesanel hadn't replied to him, and the multitude of mysteries piqued Bologue's curiosity to the point of being irresistible. Now, he finally found some informed individuals to clarify the complex mysteries.

"Even to say, the Gray Trade Association's selling of Alchemy Armaments, in their perspective, is also a form of sacrifice to the Tyrant... continually pouring Mammon Coins into the Great Rift is a sacrificial act."

In his excitement, Bologue spoke quickly and walked directly to Lebius's desk, facing him.

All the dots connected into lines, countless lines sketched out a grand picture; Bologue finally saw it all clearly.

"Are we really so close to these crazed things?"

Bologue's voice even had a hint of laughter; no one knew if he was angry or excited.

In Oubos, within the city where countless people lived, everyone existed under the illusion of stability, separated from that evil existence by dense fog.

Like people and shadows.

Faced with Bologue's heavy interrogation, Lebius nodded slightly, confirming everything. Realizing his speculation was correct, the joy in Bologue's eyes grew more intense, and he asked seriously.

"So, what does the Original Sin represented by the Tyrant mean?"

Yas and Geoffrey grew tense. Clearly, Bologue was asking things he shouldn't, just as the Ninth Group Leader Carnegie had said; once ordinary staff knew these forbidden secrets, they might be arrested by the Ninth Group the next second.

Lebius showed no intention of continuing to hide and said frankly.

"Greedy Mammon."

The moment the true name was spoken, everyone clearly noticed the room's atmosphere stagnate for an instant, then began flowing again.

Bologue sat down abruptly on the chair opposite the desk, as if everything was as expected, wearing a helpless smile.

"This guy is really narcissistic, naming the coin after himself."

Names have magic power, and those with some knowledge of the intelligence would refer to these beings by their revered titles, to avoid inadvertently bringing their attention with a casual whisper.

The Crimson Queen, the Tyrant...

Bologue had personally experienced the feeling of being watched by the Devil, and it was extremely unpleasant. Even with an Undying Body, he didn't want to experience it again.

Surprisingly, under the Tyrant's design, he had split himself into two roles: one was the Tyrant to whom the residents of the Wandering Crossroad paid taxes, and the other was Mammon engraved upon the coin.

"When someone uses Mammon Coins, when they murmur this name softly..."

Bologue whispered; he speculated that the Tyrant was using this method to control everything, with each call causing human beings to reveal themselves in the ignorant darkness.

No one interrupted Bologue's thoughts; everyone patiently waited for him.

"Although I anticipated it, it's still surprising how things turned out this way," Bologue quickly adapted to the situation, "So, am I involved in the Devil's conflict?"

"It seems so. Not sure if the Gray Trade Association is acting under the Tyrant's orders, but you are indeed targeted by the Tyrant," Lebius replied.

"Hmm? Feels pretty nice, still don't know what he plans to do though."

Bologue didn't feel much about it. Long before all this, he had already connected with the Tyrant. Everything now is just an extension of a stormy night, like an ominous fate. No matter how hard you try to avoid it, it's already predestined.

"Don't you have any thoughts?" Geoffrey asked curiously at that moment.

He could understand Bologue's self-perception as a villain, as well as the notion of treating the entire Order Bureau as a violent institution. But no matter what, there is a bottom line to all this, and that bottom line is undoubtedly the Devil.

The Order Bureau despises the Devil, yet they have indeed traded with the Devil. Often, they are not absolutely opposed; when necessary, they can also be allies.

With Bologue's violent obstinate attitude, Geoffrey thought his reaction would be stronger. But in fact, Bologue seemed to care nothing about these.

"Thoughts? No thoughts. Our dealings with the Devil don't conflict with wanting to slaughter the Devil."

Bologue had none of those awkward thoughts, unaffected by any stance.

"Besides, you must know your enemy well enough to understand how to pierce his throat."

Geoffrey thought he would see himself torn between good and evil, which might let Geoffrey down; Bologue never pondered such things.

Yas was also a bit surprised when conveying related intelligence down the Forsaken Crossroads; he'd suspected and worried about Bologue's emotions upon knowing the secret.

Their worries were justified. As veterans of the secret war to win that difficult Extraordinary war, both Yas and Geoffrey's hearts were filled with reluctance, even self-doubt, while trading with the Tyrant.

Their firm stance began to waver, alongside their trembling beliefs.

Fortunately, they were no longer the angry young men on the battlefield; years had made them more skilled, calm, and insidious.

But these successors were different. They were young, vigorous, full of anger, so these pieces of intelligence begged for ease with the Devil in the Order Bureau were uniformly listed at extremely high grades, with few newcomers able to access them.

"I said he was suitable for this job."

Lebius smiled and spoke. He had long anticipated Bologue's indifferent reaction.

Bologue was different from other newcomers. He was too special; he understood the sinister rules of this dark world, even serving as the deputy of these rules.

"The Gray Trade Association believes in the Tyrant, but as you said, it's a variant sect. They wander through various countries for years, exchanging things of supreme value in transactions, finally returning with their haul to offer it all to the Tyrant within the Forsaken Crossroads."

Upon hearing Lebius' explanation, Bologue replied, "A feast every few years? I thought they were more grandiose."

"The Gray Trade Association's movements are quite mysterious. They rarely act collectively, mostly dividing into several trade caravans, each wandering different regions with no consistent return times... If they gathered together and returned to the Great Rift, it would be deemed a declaration of war by the Order Bureau," Lebius said.

Bologue nodded, suddenly thinking of so much Extraordinary power flowing in, just like when the King's Secret Sword invaded; anyone would think it signaled warfare.

"Forsaken Crossroads is the Tyrant's abode, the endpoint of the Gray Trade Association's long journey, where all value is submitted in that gloom."

"Value... always value. Sometimes I feel Forsaken Crossroads is shrouded by a force, a Devil's power encompassing that absolute rule," Bologue said, looking directly at Lebius, "an absolutely fair exchange between values."

Lebius paused, hesitated slightly, then spoke.

"Rumors have circulated in the Forsaken Crossroads that as long as you pay enough Mammon Coins to the Tyrant, create enough value there, your wish will come true... But such rumors have yet to be recorded as truth, always approached with skepticism."

"Then, can I understand it as, if enough value is generated for the Tyrant, it can replace the soul to trade with the Tyrant?" Bologue speculated.

"I'm not sure; since the Secret War, we've ceased contact with the Tyrant, doing our own things peacefully without disturbing each other," Lebius replied.

"But now you send me to the Great Rift," Bologue pressed.

"No matter how peacefully, having such a terrifying entity hidden there remains unsettling," Yas said gloomily.

Bologue had no objection to this. The King's Secret Sword was the most troublesome external foe for the Order Bureau, while the Tyrant was rooted beneath this land like a tumor. More importantly, no one knew what lay beneath the mist of the Great Rift.

"So are these people after my value?"

Bologue pondered. Though he had not contacted the Tyrant much, judging by his knowledge of the Tyrant, he likely wouldn't take the initiative to influence him.

This guy preferred gently pushing people at critical junctures, so the Gray Trade Association's attack was likely initiated by them.

The Tyrant considered Bologue to possess immense value, while they wanted to offer him to the Tyrant.

Bologue's feeling was somewhat subtle, as if being stalked by a group of perverts.

He leaned back, rested on the chair, and gazed at the ash-gray ceiling, muttering softly.

"Conflict, endless conflict."

Chapter 258: Illusory World

Great Rift, Alchemy Workshop.

Nearing midnight, Bologue returned to Teda's Alchemy Workshop, waves of noise coming from above suggesting Teda was still busy.

Bologue went straight to the small hideout in the corner, sat at the table, and spread a document out on the surface.

After leaving the Order Bureau, Bologue had considered whether to go home or come here. After much deliberation, Bologue ultimately returned here, the core of the conspiracy, feeling troubled and worried.

Opening the document, it was an action file and related materials. Even though Bologue had many speculations, it was just speculation; no one really knew what these merchants were aiming to do.

But Bologue was already involved, even becoming crucial, having been enrolled in the action against the Gray Trade Association by the Sixth Group.

To be accurate, it was a collaborative mission between the Special Operations Group and the Sixth Group. Bologue operates actively in the Great Rift, assisting the Sixth Group when necessary, and vice versa.

The Sixth Group began investigating and searching the Gray Trade Association, a very tedious and tiring process, fortunately unrelated to Bologue. A brief look at the file showed Bologue's role in the operation was more like bait, an enforcer.

If the Gray Trade Association's target is himself, they are bound to meet again. Ideally, Bologue is not a timid lamb but a fierce hunting dog. If they rashly reach out, they will be bitten in return.

Bologue's life temporarily returned to normal tracks; the rest is just waiting for news from the Sixth Group. Yas mentioned he would take him to meet the Sixth Group members when time allowed.

In the Field Operations Department, the number of members in each action group varies, with small numbers like the Special Operations Group or large ones like the Tenth Group, with nearly fifty members.

The number of an action group's members is somewhat restricted by the group's functional tendencies. The Special Operations Group has just been established, and its members are all Debtors, making it difficult to recruit fresh blood.

The Tenth Group is responsible for the areas outside Oubos in the Oath City. They wander frequently among the countries squeezed between the Rhine Alliance and the Kagader Empire, as extensions of the Order Bureau's reach, their numbers growing due to complex tasks and vast territories.

The Sixth Group has more than ten members, usually divided into different pairs, but they gather into a formidable force during significant operations, which arouses Bologue's curiosity.

According to Geoffrey, a flock of Origin School Condensers are true Condenser assassins, making him quite eager to witness their coordination in battle.

Closing the file, Bologue locked it in the safe, his mind then absorbed by another matter.

After bidding farewell to Adelle, Bologue thought he had severed ties with that dreadful past, facing a brand-new life, a long journey ahead.

But on the way back to the hideout, Bologue kept pondering, his heavy thoughts troubling him immensely.

Touching his pocket, Bologue picked up a Canyin coin, placing it under the desk lamp.

The Silver symbol under the light caught his eye; its strange nature made it seem as though it would disintegrate into droplets, turning into actual mercury.

Bologue realized one thing; the current conflicts can be seen as remnants of secret wars, further traceable to being after effects of the Fall of the Holy City.

An extension of an extension.

"The start of everything."

This is the starting point of Bologue's fate, also the origin of all present turmoil, a continuation of that bizarre war...

Sudden knocking interrupted Bologue's thoughts; he looked toward the door, already knowing who came without guessing.

"Come in, Aimou."

The door was pushed open, Aimou cautiously poked her head in, curiously asking.

"How did you know it was me?"

"Guessing," Bologue was too tired to explain.

Only Aimou, Teda, or Palmer would knock; since Teda was still busy when he got back, and even if he finished, he'd knock heavily and enter immediately without waiting for Bologue's consent.

Palmer? That's even simpler, as it's a rest day, he would never show up at the workplace, nor does he ever knock.

Clearing his mind of those chaotic thoughts, Bologue focused on Aimou, unsure what she wanted as she fully opened the door, holding a tray with a sandwich with bacon and fried egg.

"Want a midnight snack?"

Aimou hesitated a bit before continuing.

"I read in a book that food is essential for humans, and during eating, you feel a sense of satisfaction. I don't know what that feels like, but it's said to bring happiness... especially eating late at night, doubling that joy."

"Ah..." Listening to her, Bologue lightly rubbed his forehead.

"Don't you like it?"

"No, just tired; working overtime on a rest day is awful, though there's overtime pay."

Rescuing Kemp and Shelley was considered a mission turnout, not only with overtime pay but also extra task bonuses. However, rather than financial rewards, Bologue wished for some rest, as his continuous mental tension had tired him out.

But those were lies; rubbing his forehead only stemmed from finding Aimou more troubling than those concerns.

Whether it's the Gray Trade Association or the Tyrant, Bologue simply needs to smash their skulls one by one with the Sheep Horn Hammer. But it's different with Aimou. She perplexes Bologue, yet she hasn't done anything wrong—in fact, she's very kind to him.

Bologue has lived for so many years and few people have shown him kindness. Most people, in contrast, would rather see him dead.

Aimou placed the tray on Bologue's table and stood shyly to the side.

"Are you trying to please me?" Bologue suddenly asked.

"Ah... ah?"

Aimou was dumbfounded by Bologue's question, her eyes' halo swirling like waves.

"I... I thought you were mad at me," Aimou cautiously replied.

"Why should I be mad at you?" Bologue countered.

"But you seem a bit off today."

Aimou referred to their conversation in the morning when Bologue suddenly became cold toward her, leaving her unsure of how to react.

"It's nothing, Aimou. Humans are like this; our emotions are volatile... It's normal, you shouldn't worry too much about it."

Aimou was more sensitive than Bologue had anticipated. He guessed that since his departure, she had been wondering how she had upset him.

Bologue couldn't help but laugh. Aimou was just like a child—a child who doesn't understand all this chaos, who shows adults strange mud simply because she finds it interesting, yet cannot understand why adults would respond with disdain.

"Normal... is it?" Aimou was a bit surprised by Bologue's answer.

"Has no one ever told you this?"

"No, books don't write about such things," Aimou shook her head. "The stories in these courting novels are too complicated, convoluted. I can't understand them."

Silence.

Bologue suddenly looked seriously at Aimou, which alarmed her slightly. Bologue then placed his hand on her shoulder and earnestly spoke.

"Aimou, stop reading those kinds of books. Whether the authors understand these matters themselves is questionable, let alone what they write in their stories."

Bologue seemed a bit conflicted, as if unsure how to explain these things to Aimou.

"The human world is not like that. It will mislead you."

"Huh? So, do Hunters not exist either?"

"What are Hunters?"

"The book 'Night Hunter,' you know, where monsters roam the city, and Hunters go out at night to hunt these creatures," Aimou said.

"That likely doesn't exist. The only things roaming between cities are Demons; those who hunt them should be Condensers," Bologue earnestly discussed.

"Then... is the life-and-death rescue filled with human brilliance also fake?"

"According to Order Bureau regulations, in hopeless rescue situations, one should preserve strength and prioritize the mission."

Bologue explained coldly.

Aimou shattered, literally shattered. The halo in her eyes broke into several pieces, while her body slightly heated up. Bologue felt she was overloaded.

Aimou's understanding of the world all came from books. To her, the stories in novels were events that had happened in reality. In the outside world, Hunters would move in groups at night, and by day, there were people in love, abandoning wealth to elope.

Bologue shattered the alchemy puppet's illusion, telling her there's no such beautiful fantasy in this world; only hard coldness remains.

"But... the world is not always absolutely rational."

Just as Aimou was about to explode, Bologue timely intervened, allowing her to detach from the complex thoughts.

"What?"

"Reality is rational, but because it's too rational, too cold, people create some illusory works, entrusting their inner beauty within them... The stories you see are fake, but the emotions in them are real."

Bologue spoke to Aimou in a way he could understand.

In this aspect, Bologue was actually a bit like Aimou. The long time in the Black Prison left Bologue with a strong yearning for stories; he loved watching movies, reading books, listening to intense music...

All of this was like a safe harbor, allowing Bologue to briefly escape from the busy reality and enjoy that moment of inner peace.

"Because humans are overly rational, they need emotional, illusory stories?" Aimou softly asked.

Bologue thought for a moment and nodded in confirmation of Aimou's words.

#### Chapter 259: Romantic Color

Humans are wild animals, but precisely because humans have obtained rationality, they have firmly constrained their wildness beneath the skin, thus establishing a clear boundary between humans and animals.

Yet no matter how rational humans become, they still cannot completely abandon their primal essence; humans will still experience joy, anger, sorrow, and perhaps out of impulse, do things that escape rationality.

"If rationality is so important, then is it wrong to do something that escapes rationality?" Aimou asked.

"It depends," Bologue thought for a moment, "not every act of escaping rationality is wrong."

Bologue had escaped rationality once before, at that time, he was impatient, every second was unbearable, and the searing anger was almost piercing through his chest.

"For example?" Aimou asked curiously.

"For example..."

When giving examples, Bologue felt a headache coming on; he felt like he was educating a child, and with a slight mistake in words, he might mislead Aimou.

Bologue thought he could hardly be considered a good person, using his own template on Aimou might inadvertently cultivate a violent bandit.

He had thought of using his stormy night revenge as an example, but such things were too special, the emotions were complex, Aimou might find it difficult to grasp the feelings involved, more importantly, it involved life and death.

Bologue didn't want to influence Aimou's view on life and death, just as she said, life is very important, she is still young and inexperienced, Bologue didn't want to see her stained with blood.

"Those courtship novels you've read," Bologue thought of what example to use, "they often have such scenes, like the male protagonist abandoning millions of family assets to elope with his lover."

"Mmm hmm."

Aimou nodded affirmatively, indicating she quite liked such stories.

Bologue understood, it might also be Alice who liked such stories, Aimou's performance was just a projection influenced by Alice.

After listening to Teda's explanation, sometimes Bologue couldn't understand whether he was facing Aimou or Alice, or maybe they had merged into one, with overlapping silhouettes, hard to discern real from fake.

"Such things are irrational and foolish," Bologue commented, "yet these things are correct."

"Irrational, yet correct?"

"Yes, let alone millions in family assets, even if abandoning everything, to be with the other person, nothing else matters."

Bologue paused and continued.

"From a bystander's perspective, this behavior may seem extremely foolish, but to the person involved, if he is happy, that's enough; we call this... romance."

"Romance?"

"Yes, romance."

Bologue reaffirmed, though he didn't quite understand it himself, he summed it up, speaking on a whim.

"The opposite of rationality is romance.

Life needs some romance."

Aimou lowered her head, seemingly understanding, while the halo in her eyes cycled, the atmosphere fell silent.

Bologue observed Aimou, pinpoints of light passed under her skin, resembling a gelatinous material; faintly illuminating the metallic skeleton within, the Constant Motion Core continuously absorbed the surrounding Ether, storing and acting upon Aimou's body, ensuring her body's multiple systems operated stably.

Aimou was like a human-shaped Void Realm, various forces constructed her body, Alchemy Matrix spread every inch.

Bologue suddenly had a curious conjecture; Aimou, in a sense, could be considered possessing a human soul, only this soul appeared in the form of the Philosopher's Stone, and she could be viewed as a cold dead object, along with the Alchemy Matrix throughout her body; Aimou seemed like an Alchemy Armament.

Then Bologue suddenly recalled he had never asked Aimou about her abilities, as an Alchemy Puppet, she must possess some extraordinary traits, even possessing another form of Secret Energy.

"That sounds quite nice," after a long while, Aimou's voice slowly sounded, "I like such romantic plots."

Perhaps the atmosphere was just right, Bologue couldn't help but chatter, "A killer repents because of a kiss, a coward walks towards death for a ridiculous reason."

"I see, I roughly understand," Aimou said, "humans are indeed complex."

"Perhaps, sometimes humans are very complex, sometimes they are simple and can be seen through easily," Bologue said.

"Have you done 'romantic' things?" Aimou asked.

"I have, but I surely won't talk about the details."

"Unspeakable?"

"It's just too long, it would take a lot of time to explain, and I'm about to sleep."

Bologue pointed to the clock on the wall, his routines were very regular, now Bologue was preparing to sleep.

"Oh!" Aimou looked embarrassed.

"See you tomorrow, Aimou." Bologue ushered her out and glanced at the night snack, he said, "I will finish it."

"Alright, alright."

Aimou nodded repeatedly, backed to the doorway, intending to close the door but hesitated and said to Bologue.

"Then... goodnight."

Closing the door, Aimou didn't leave immediately but stood still for a while, looked up, the halo in her eyes stabilized, motionless, as if recalling all the conversations just now.

At the sound of silver bell-like laughter, Aimou looked to the other side of the corridor, a familiar figure was standing there, smiling at her.

"Alice..." Aimou murmured.

Alchemy Puppets don't dream, yet dream-like scenes were playing before her eyes, but more bizarrely, this time Aimou was still running, not lying on the maintenance table, nor entering dormancy.

As she thought, dreams were gradually invading reality, during this period Alice's appearances were increasingly frequent, until she didn't need to fall into dormancy to see her existence.

"Have you always been here?" Aimou asked.

The laughter came again, vision blurred momentarily, Alice appeared in front of her as though out of nowhere, like a ghost reaching out a hand, gently pressing against Aimou's chest.

"I am right here," Alice said.

Looking at the face similar to hers, Aimou felt like she was looking in the mirror.

Aimou possessed wisdom, she could discern herself from the mirror, but the Alice in front of her is herself yet isn't herself.

She also understood that she was merely the reflection in the mirror.

"What are you doing, Aimou?" Alice asked, confused.

"What?"

"What nonsense were you talking to him?" Alice circled Aimou, scrutinizing her, "In my eyes, you have nothing to hide, I am you, the real you."

Alice approached Aimou, whispered in her ear, in a moment of trance Aimou felt waves of warmth from her ear, she knew it was an illusion, she didn't have such sensitive perceptive organs.

"I know your little secret, Aimou."

The gentle voice turned seductive, Aimou struggled, "I'm trying."

"In that case, you should seem... a bit more foolish, show weakness to everyone until no one cares, let go of all vigilance," Alice said.

"Or are you still unable to make a decision? What are you hesitating about?"

Alice did not understand Aimou, she was influenced by her Mind Projection, like a reflection of herself, but this reflection was flawed, with differing thoughts.

"I..." Aimou was speechless.

"You really are a coward,"

Alice showed a scornful look, evaluating.

"Afraid to hate with all your might, nor dare to completely abandon resistance, harboring a shred of hope."

Neither here nor there.

Alice hugged Aimou's face, puzzledly asked.

"What are you hoping for, Aimou? Someone to rescue you? But you know nothing about this world, know very few people... this world is extremely unfamiliar to you.

Why, then? Why do you have such thoughts?"

Aimou said nothing, her thoughts clashed in her mind, she had realized this issue long ago, but as if fearing to face it, she constantly avoided everything.

Staring at the pitiful Aimou, Alice suddenly laughed, intimately leaned closer, nose touching, voice echoed.

"Don't worry, you still have me, I am your last ally, since you dare not do so, let me do it."

In the quiet, dim corridor, Aimou stood alone, as though awakening from a dream, the so-called soul returning to the body.

After brief panic, Aimou calmed down, deeply looked at the door to the small base room.

The halo in her eyes rhythmically circulated, Aimou slowly clenched her fist.

## Chapter 260: Winner in Life

After the rescue incident, life became calm and peaceful, with no sudden events at all. Even extraordinary crimes were pathetically few, as if the outlaws fled the Great Rift overnight, leaving behind only the Hunter to patrol his territory.

Bologue has been quite idle lately, so much so that he feels uncomfortable. He's been trying to calm himself by doing other things. For instance, he is currently sitting in the small outpost house, flipping through the "Golden Thesis," trying to understand the details of the Triple Law.

Humans, Demons, and Debtors are distinguished by the integrity of their souls. Humans possess intact souls, Demons have lost their entire souls, and Debtors have broken souls.

The Alchemy Matrix is implanted in the soul, allowing humans to normally undergo the trials of the Triple Law and ascend. Demons, having lost their entire souls, lack the foundational cornerstone for the Alchemy Matrix to extend, thus cannot ascend.

Debtors are between the two; their broken souls can serve as a cornerstone for the growth of the Alchemy Matrix, but due to the fragility of their soul, this cornerstone is unstable, making the ascent for Debtors extremely difficult and perilous.

Fortunately, such defects don't affect Bologue. As an Undead, no matter how dangerous something might be, he only needs to resurrect.

Suddenly, Bologue's train of thought was interrupted by the sound of snoring. He turned his head to see the napping Palmer.

As expected, Palmer's personal belongings have increasingly filled the small outpost house over time. First, it was novels piling up under the bed, then boxes of snacks and beer. He even brought a tape recorder to play songs occasionally in the outpost house.

Hmm... Bologue quite enjoys this aspect. As partners, the two of them surprisingly share a similar taste in music.

Bologue isn't that rigid. Aside from occasionally nagging Palmer, he doesn't interfere much and sometimes even actively tries to get into these things.

For example, some novels.

Bologue rarely reads novels. He spends his spare time learning various extraordinary knowledge to quickly catch up with the understanding of this era. Thus, his entertainment is limited to watching movies and listening to music... if demon slaying counts.

Recently, whenever Bologue has some free time, he flips through the pile of novels Palmer brought. One novel that caught his attention is titled "Night Hunter."

Aimou mentioned this book. During a ride on the subway with Marion and among the supplies transported to the Desperate Outpost, this book was also included.

Amidst such curiosity, Bologue started to read this story, though due to time constraints, he has only read the beginning.

"Ah..."

Palmer let out a loud crow-like cry before groggily sitting up from the bed, indicating he had woken up.

Their work has truly been leisurely lately, with only two patrols a day and hardly any special occurrences. Bologue has been tracking the whereabouts of the Gray Trade Association, but it seems as if these guys never existed, leaving no traces at all.

Bologue even asked Yas about their progress, but their situation was similar to his, as if the Gray Trade Association vanished, leaving the investigation at a stalemate.

Palmer is the only one benefiting from this impasse, ecstatic and claiming it's his lucky day.

"Speaking of which, Bologue, the Vow Festival is coming up soon. Do you have any plans?" Palmer asked, glancing at the calendar.

"Not really... I'll probably be here on duty. What about you?" Bologue didn't have any particular feelings about the festival.

The day after tomorrow is the Vow Festival, a day when Oubos rose from the ravaged land. After a month's preparation, the entire city is ready for the celebration.

"On duty? That's too boring!" Palmer's voice rose.

"There's nothing much to do anyway, so being on duty here is fine. Why, are you going to join me?"

Bologue looked lightly at Palmer, knowing he was a lazy dog who would never work on duty during the Vow Festival. That's why Bologue had taken up the task right from the start.

"No, I'll pass. I have things to do during the Vow Festival," Palmer said.

"What kind of things? Celebrating with Serey and the others, or racing down the streets?" Bologue could easily guess Palmer's private life.

"How could it be? It's the Vow Festival, after all." Palmer protested loudly.

Seeing this, Bologue smiled slight and pressed, "So what are you going to do? Better come up with a decent lie."

Bologue knew his partner too well. Palmer was cunning and nimble, slackening at work but becoming reliable in dangerous situations.

That's why Palmer often spouted nonsense, supplemented by his peculiar childhood experiences. It seemed that the Clarks family had a touch of comedic talent.

After a moment of silence, Palmer said.

"I'm going to call my fiancée. She's a chatterbox, but fortunately, her family requires her to sleep by ten, so I can catch Serey's party after ten... It seems you guessed right, since the final stop is always the Undying Club."

Before Palmer could finish his sentence, Bologue burst into laughter. He couldn't have predicted that Palmer would tell such a lie; his partner indeed had an irresistible comedic charm.

Bologue's laughter gradually stopped, while Palmer remained serious and grew more solemn, Bologue's smile also gradually stiffened.

After a long silence, Bologue slowly spoke.

"Are you... serious?"

"What do you think?"

Palmer looked at the awkward Bologue, a smile beaming on his face, as if he had won over Bologue in some way.

"No no no, how could someone like you possibly have a fiancée?" Bologue didn't understand.

"What do you mean by someone like me? I'm a rightful heir of the Clarks family! Becoming an unfortunate debtor is just something that happened later, but before that, I was really shining brightly!"

Palmer rarely sounded assertive, shouting repeatedly.

"Don't you understand what it means to be from a big family? It's quite normal to have a fiancée!"

Bologue fell silent again, while Palmer came over, patted Bologue's shoulder, with a look of deep-seated concern.

"Partner, I know your mental state has issues, but ah, you can't just give up on yourself like that."

"What exactly are you trying to say?"

"You're too idle, find yourself a girlfriend, stop thinking about Demons, cutting through those things every day won't lead anywhere." Palmer spoke with the tone of someone with experience.

Bologue raised his hand intending to hit Palmer, but this guy reacted faster, moved sideways to dodge, with a mischievous smile.

"Then I'll rely on you for the Vow Festival, partner!"

Palmer laid back in bed, reached for a book, and didn't forget to give Bologue a thumbs up.

"Sigh..."

Bologue sighed helplessly, another reason for his duty was that he truly didn't have much to do during the Vow Festival.

He didn't have family to meet, nor friends to celebrate with... Actually, he did have some friends, like Palmer, Geoffrey, Serey, etc., but everyone had their own plans for the Vow Festival.

Thinking about this made Bologue feel much lonelier, ever since coming out from the Black Prison, the whole world had changed, Bologue was like a ghost traveling through time.

Bologue shook his head, trying hard not to think about these disturbing things, he was an Undead, with endless years awaiting him, if he got defeated by these trivial matters, then he would be too fragile.

"I'll go see Teda." Bologue mentioned to Palmer before pushing the door and leaving.

He planned to ask Teda about the Vow Festival plan, if Teda also didn't have any plans, they could accelerate their research pace.

Just like their investigation of the Gray Trade Association, the research on Bologue's Alchemy Matrix had also hit a bottleneck.

Initially, Teda's research was on the Alchemy Matrix of a Seeker of Glory, Xilin had almost completely exhibited this power, providing a wealth of data for Teda's research, but now it was different, Bologue was merely a Condenser, he had no ability to fully unfold the power of the Summoning Hand.

This kind of thing can't be rushed, Bologue can't possibly ascend to a Seeker of Glory in just a few days, it sounds too ridiculous.

Teda realized that this would be a long-term task, along with Bologue's ascension, this power would gradually reveal its full picture in front of them.

Ascending to the second-floor experiment area, Bologue saw Aimou busy at the workbench, aside from taking care of Teda's daily life and a few auxiliary tasks, Aimou's most important task every day was learning Alchemy.

It might be because of her identity as an Alchemy Puppet, Aimou was exceptionally adept at learning these things, and during her learning, she could apply learned knowledge to her own body.

Teda once mentioned, the gel-like substance mimicking skin on Aimou's torso was made by Aimou herself, not only does it look nice and mimic skin, but also has strong shock absorption and protective ability to stabilize Aimou's internal mechanical structure.

Bologue took a few more glances, only to see Aimou's pitch-black arm slowly becoming illusory, until it completely dissolved into nothingness, like a shadow, she extended her hand into another piece of metal.

This was the first time Bologue saw this, and he didn't know what it was, but he guessed it might be Aimou's "Secret Energy", she could be regarded as an Alchemy Armament with self-awareness, so some of her strange abilities were quite normal.

At the end of the corridor, Bologue saw Teda, they nodded to each other, then stood together, watching from a distance through the safety glass, Aimou busy at the workbench.

"She really loves Alchemy, it's just like us humans, pursuing our own souls, she's also researching where she originally came from."

In Teda's words, there was a hint of philosophy, but Bologue didn't agree, he shook his head.